



**PRESS RELEASE
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By Sgt. Balinda O'Neal

Alaska, Mongolia state partnership flourishes over a decade

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — The state of Alaska partnership between the Alaska National Guard and the country of Mongolia spans over a decade and has evolved into a strategic nation-state relationship.

The two were paired in 2003 under the National Guard State Partnership Program, which began pairing states and countries in 1993. The program was implemented to couple foreign countries with states to develop unique security partnerships that ensure U.S. strategic access and a sustained presence in countries worldwide.

Alaska and Mongolia share similar geography, Arctic climate, isolated rural population and a vast mineral wealth. These commonalities and the similar challenges both face, allow for a better understanding of each other.

"Mongolians and Alaskans face similar social, economic, and climate related opportunities and challenges, particularly in rural areas," said Maj. Adam Negri, the AKNG bilateral affairs officer. "Mongolia and Alaska have vast mineral wealth, but have a hard time accessing it because of lack of infrastructure. Most of Alaska's population lives in the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna area, while most of Mongolia's population is centered on Ulaanbaatar with the rest of both populations dispersed and largely rural."

Mongolia is a stable democracy sandwiched between China and Russia, and is supportive of the U.S. Since 2004, Mongolia has been deploying its soldiers alongside U.S. troops in Iraq and now Afghanistan. Additionally, the Mongolian Armed Forces have over 950 soldiers participating in several UN Peacekeeping operations in Africa.

"The Mongolian Armed Forces are tailored to the peacetime needs and the economic potential of the country," explained Negri. "They participate quite heavily in peacekeeping operations in Africa supporting the United Nations. Mongolia has realized the tangible benefits of being a global partner in peace and security and enjoys a voice at the international table far greater than it would otherwise."

Since 2004, AKNG personnel have embedded with MAF and have served along-side them in

Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 1,500 Soldiers and Airmen have traveled to Mongolia for training and exercises in support of Mongolia's peacekeepers and first responders.

"Because of the success of the Alaska - Mongolia state partnership, the Alaska National Guard is continually asked to participate in U.S. Pacific Command exercises and subject matter expert exchanges," said Negri. "The active duty military has recognized that the State Partnership Program is effective and leverages it to enhance stability in the Asia-Pacific region."

Approximately 75 Alaska Guardsmen are preparing now to participate for the eighth consecutive year in Khaan Quest; a multi-national, joint military exercise in Mongolia, which is the cornerstone of the U.S.-Mongolia relationship. The AKNG takes a leading role in this exercise and habitually provides one-third of all U.S. participants.

"Khaan Quest for the Alaska National Guard is where friends get together," explained Negri. "Due to rotation, active duty personnel do not have the ability to send the same exercise planners every year. Alaska Guardsmen and their Mongolian counterparts develop stronger bonds over the years which allows for a much freer exchange of ideas in both directions."

The SPP is designed to be mutually beneficial. Alaska National Guardsmen get the chance to share expertise, practice their teaching and training skills, experience another culture and learn how a foreign military force organizes and operates.

The military-to-military relationship between the AKNG and MAF has been a catalyst for the nation-to-state initiative. The Alaska-Mongolia partnership has expanded to include relationships between the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, the University of Alaska system, U.S. Army Alaska, and the Alaska District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and their Mongolian counterparts.

The U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia, Ms. Piper Campbell, made her first visit to Alaska last week to help strengthen the already positive relationship and recognize the great work Alaska has done in Mongolia to promote peace and security, assist in disaster preparedness and partner for better education.

"The Alaska-Mongolia State Partnership has grown from a modest cooperation between the Alaska National Guard and the Mongolian military to much more," affirmed Campbell.

The Alaska-Mongolia partnership is looking to expand in two areas; defense support to civil authorities and arctic maintenance and operations.

"As a National Guard, we work very well with our first responders and emergency managers to support the needs of Alaskans in times of disaster," said Negri. "The Mongolian army has the same mission and they are working to take best practices from Alaska and include them in how they prepare for and respond to disasters."

Alaska has been working with the Mongolian National Emergency Management Agency since

its establishment in 2004. Earlier this month, the AKNG and USARAK joined 100 participants from 30 agencies across Mongolia, the U.S. and other countries, to participate in a disaster response exercise and exchange called Gobi Wolf, hosted by NEMA.

"The exercise, which simulated an earthquake in Mongolia's largest city, Ulaanbaatar, resembled Alaska's Vigilant Guard exercise," said Negri. "NEMA officials attended Vigilant Guard in 2014 and modeled the exercise after their participation in Alaska."

Future exchanges between engineers from the AKNG and Mongolian military, which would focus on maintenance and operations in the arctic, are being reviewed.

The Alaska-Mongolia partnership is so imperative that the National Guard Bureau and USPACOM assigned an Alaska National Guardsman to the embassy as the bilateral affairs officer and chief of defense cooperation.

"As the bilateral affairs officer for the Alaska National Guard, I coordinate all aspects of the Alaska – Mongolia relationship and make sure all activities are complementary to the embassy, USPACOM and Mongolia's goals," said Negri. "I am also the chief of defense cooperation which leads the DoD and USPACOM military security cooperation program and serves as the liaison of humanitarian assistance matters with Mongolia."

As a member of the ambassador's country team, Negri feels extremely rewarded that he was given the opportunity to serve in his current position and live in Mongolia.

"Mongolia is a great place to live which parallels with Alaska. Both are extremely friendly and welcoming, have a healthy love for the outdoors, and plenty of open space when you leave the city," said Negri. "It has been a wonderful opportunity for both me and my family to learn and grow in another culture."

"Alaska has contributed greatly in Mongolia," added Campbell. "Whether building hospitals or schools, providing medical and dental treatment in underserved areas, working with students, or training with Mongolia's military, Alaskans have made a difference in the lives of Mongolians."

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Cutlines:

150423-Z-CA180-011

The U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia, Ms. Piper Campbell, discusses the importance and success of the strategic relationship between Alaska and Mongolia during a press conference at the Alaska National Guard armory on Joint Base-Elmendorf Richardson April 23. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O'Neal)

140625-Z-MW427-034

Staff Sgt. Colin Oppedard, a survival lane instructor with the Alaska Army National Guard,

teaches a class on antenna theory to members of the Mongolian Armed Forces during a survival-training course as part of Khaan Quest 2014 at Five Hills Training Area, Mongolia, June 25, 2014. KQ14 is a regularly scheduled, multinational exercise co-sponsored by U.S. Army, Pacific, and hosted annually by Mongolian Armed Forces. KQ14 is the latest in a continuing series of exercises designed to promote regional peace and security. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Edward Eagerton)

140328-Z-DK135-032

Staff Sgt. Ned Tri, right, Alaska Medical Station clinical noncommissioned officer-in-charge, explains to Maj. Ariunaa Chadraabal, left, and Col. Ulambayay Nyamkhuu, middle, representatives from Mongolia, the contents of a medical bag used at the AMS during Exercises Alaska Shield and Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014, March 28. AS/VG-14 is a regional, tactically focused exercise with multiple interagency field-training exercises that are focused on the response and recovery from a major earthquake and tsunami. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck)

Editors and Reporters:

B-Roll: U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia visits Alaska, discusses strategic nation-state relationship

<http://dvidshub.net/r/8zcvnn>

For FILE video of exercise Khaan Quest:

KQ13 Opening Ceremony

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/297937/khaan-quest-2013-opening-ceremony#.VTqFZU3wupo>

Khaan Quest 14 Cooperative Health Engagement

<http://dvidshub.net/r/ze7ycn>

Khaan Quest 14 Engineering Civic Action Program projects

<http://dvidshub.net/r/ccw8ze>